



Improving nutrition in Simbu and Eastern Highlands with nutrition-sensitive value chains: the way forward for the Government of Papua New Guinea

The Highlands region boasts the highest proportion of households engaged in agriculture in Papua New Guinea (PNG).^{1,2} Despite this, only one in six children in the Highlands consumes a nutritionally adequate diet to ensure appropriate growth and development.¹ As a result, up to 61 percent of children in the Highlands are found to be stunted³ and up to 14 percent wasted.⁴

To ensure children in the Highlands, as well as women of reproductive age, receive adequate nutrition there is an urgent need to examine food value chains using a nutrition-sensitive approach: both from the supply side (the way foods are produced and made available) and the demand side (factors influencing consumer demand and consumption).

Recognizing this need, in 2021 the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in consultation with the Government of Papua New Guinea and development partners, conducted an assessment to identify requirements to support nutrition-sensitive value chain development in two Highlands provinces: Simbu and Eastern Highlands. The assessment found clear opportunities for stakeholders including national and provincial governments to support nutrition-sensitive value chain development in the two provinces to not only improve nutrition but to enhance economic and social development.

1. Endorse pending government policy documents that will support nutrition-sensitive value chain development

The Government of Papua New Guinea and development partners have collaborated to develop several fundamental policy documents that would provide directive and resources to support nutrition-sensitive value chain development in Papua New Guinea, as well as support the country to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **These documents however await government endorsement. This is delaying critical action to improve diets and prevent malnutrition.**

The **National Food Security Policy 2018–2027 and Action Plan 2018–2023** were prepared by the Department of Agriculture and Livestock (DAL) with support from FAO to guide the resourcing, implementation and governance of interventions to improve the availability and consumption of locally produced nutritious foods to reduce malnutrition. This includes strengthening nutrition-sensitive value chains. The Policy and Plan however need to be endorsed by the National Executive Committee and budget allocated. Several donors have expressed interest in contributing finances to the Plan once endorsed.

Also awaiting endorsement by the National Executive Committee is the **National Pathway Framework to transform food systems in Papua New Guinea**, prepared by the Department of Agriculture and Livestock in 2021 following national and sub regional dialogues held for the UN Food Systems Summit. The Framework summarizes the priorities, recommendations and commitments agreed by government and partners as needed to improve food systems to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals, including strengthening nutrition-sensitive value chains.

And finally, also importantly requiring government endorsement is the **Global Action Plan (GAP) on Wasting Country Operational Roadmap for Papua New Guinea** prepared by development partners in collaboration with government in 2021. The Roadmap contains a set of costed interventions, aligned

to Papua New Guinea policy commitments, to reduce the prevalence of wasting in priority geographic areas, such as strengthening nutrition-sensitive value chains.

2. Build capacities to work effectively in nutrition-sensitive value chain development

It is accepted that national and provincial governments in Papua New Guinea currently have limited capacities to effectively plan for, implement and review nutrition-sensitive interventions, including nutrition-sensitive value chains. **The endorsement and subsequent costing and financing of pending policy documents by government is urgently needed to enable resources to be allocated for nutrition-sensitive interventions.** This is critical to build capacities in nutrition-sensitive value chain development. **Just as essential is for the Government of Papua New Guinea to allocate adequate resources to the Nutrition Project Management Unit at the Department of National Planning and Monitoring (DNPM), and to provincial agriculture support and technical services, as committed in the national budget.** These resources will help build capacities across sectors that can support nutrition-sensitive value chain developing including agriculture, health and education.

To progress the endorsement of and allocation of budget to nutrition-sensitive interventions including nutrition-sensitive value chain development, **it is essential that parliamentarians and government staff build their awareness and appreciation of the importance of nutrition-sensitive interventions for improving nutrition and supporting the SDGs.** Building the awareness and capacities of national and provincial governments, as well as partners in nutrition-sensitive interventions will also improve their engagement in, collaboration on and ultimately the impact and sustainability of related initiatives.

Recognizing this, in 2022 FAO will assess the capacity gaps and needs of Government of Papua New Guinea and partners on nutrition-sensitive production and food systems and thereafter provide training to government and non-government actors in Papua New Guinea to strengthen their skills in this area. **National and provincial governments are strongly encouraged to engage and participate in these activities when the opportunity arises. All opportunities to build capacities in nutrition-sensitive interventions like nutrition-sensitive value chains should be pursued by the government in the meantime, particularly working with development partners and donors to address resource and capacity needs.**

3. Work with development partners and donors to develop nutrition-sensitive value chains

The value of developing or strengthening nutrition-sensitive value chains for improving nutrition is well recognized by development partners and donors in Papua New Guinea. Several donors have expressed interest in financing nutrition-sensitive interventions in Papua New Guinea, including nutrition-sensitive value chains. This includes the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and European Union. Indeed, many donors already financed such work in Papua New Guinea. **This interest presents a valuable opportunity for national and provincial governments to acquire resources for nutrition-sensitive value chains. This requires determining priority nutrition-sensitive value chains for development, and articulating the financing asks to develop priority nutrition-sensitive value chains.**

Several development partners also have interest in working with the Government of Papua New Guinea to develop and strengthen priority nutrition-sensitive value chains. FAO in particular has readiness to collaborate further with national and provincial governments to develop and strengthen priority nutrition-sensitive value chains, namely through their *EU-STREIT PNG* project in East and West Sepik and their *School Meal Programme* in Simbu and Eastern Highlands Province. **National and provincial governments need to also explore how agencies like the National Agricultural Research Institute and the Fresh Produce Development Agency can support nutrition-sensitive value chain development.**

4. Prioritize specific nutrition-sensitive value chains for development

Inclusive food value chains that have the greatest potential to improve nutrition outcomes need to be prioritized for development. In Simbu and Eastern Highlands there is urgent need to increase the

availability, affordability and consumption of foods rich in protein and iron in particular. Chicken, eggs, fish and nutrient-rich fish by-products are anticipated to be the most important value chains to develop to improve nutrition among women and children in these provinces. Value chains for nutrient-dense, protein-rich, plant-based foods such as legumes may also be important to develop. **Of these foods, specific nutrition-sensitive value chains for development need to be prioritized by government and resourced, based on viability and impact on nutrition.**

There are undoubtedly challenges to developing priority nutrition-sensitive value chains in Papua New Guinea. In the Highlands for example, transport and storage issues affect the reliable supply of nutritious foods. There are however ways nutrition-sensitive value chains can be developed or strengthened that overcome these challenges and can improve not only nutrition but wider development. One example is the procurement of locally grown food by government services, such as schools, as pursued by the FAO *School Meal Programme*. Such initiatives can shorten supply chains which reduces transport costs and food loss, boosting farmers' incomes and improving food availability and affordability.

National and provincial governments should make use of opportunities to work with development partners and donors to prioritise nutrition-sensitive value chain and progress their development without delay.

1. Papua New Guinea National Statistical Office, 2019 *Demographic and Health Survey 2016-2018*, Port Moresby, <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR364/FR364.pdf>
2. J. Pais and A. Verma, 2020 *Agriculture in Papua New Guinea*
3. Bristol, 2021, *Global Nutrition Report, Country Nutrition Profile: Papua New Guinea* <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/oceania/melanesia/papua-new-guinea/>
4. B. N. Pham, V. D. Silas, A. D. Okely and W. Pomat, 2021, *Measuring wasting and stunting prevalence among children under 5 years of age and associated risk factors in Papua New Guinea: New evidence from the CHES*, *Frontiers in Nutrition* Vol. 8, National Library of Medicine, [10.3389/fnut.2021.622660](https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2021.622660)

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